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C O N F I D E N T I A L LJUBLJANA 000756

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/SCE AND EUR/NCE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/26/2015

TAGS: [PREL](#) [SI](#) [YI](#)

SUBJECT: SLOVENIA: INDEPENDENT KOSOVO - WHAT WAS DRNOVSEK THINKING?

REF: LJUBLJANA 737

Classified By: COM Thomas B. Robertson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary. On October 19 Slovene President Janez Drnovsek briefed Contact Group (CG) Ambassadors in Ljubljana on his nine point plan for conditional independence of Kosovo (Reftel). (Note: text of nine-point plan will come spetel). Much to the surprise of the CG Ambassadors, the Foreign Ministry, and Drnovsek's own staff, Drnovsek took the plan public the next day, even before vetting it with the potential parties to the plan. The initial reaction from Belgrade as reported in the Slovene press was swift and negative. Drnovsek's planned November 2 visit to Belgrade was unceremoniously canceled. Press reports indicate the reaction from Pristina was more positive though the plan still falls short of Kosovar Albanian's goals. Drnovsek's reaction to all the negative press was "if nobody likes it, then it must be a good plan." Four days later, Drnovsek has not backed away from his proposal saying it is critical to get the discussion on concrete footing and headed in the direction that all know, even if they will not agree to it publicly, is inevitable - Kosovo's independence. What appeared initially as clumsy diplomacy seems now to be a deliberate gambit by Drnovsek to influence impending discussions on the future status of Kosovo and to end the "foot dragging" that he says has characterized the International Community's handling of the problem during the last five years. We expect he will continue to speak out on this subject and will weigh in on discussions with the UN Special Envoy for Kosovo Status as negotiations go forward. End Summary.

Building Support

2. (C) Drnovsek is pressing on with his mission to influence the debate on Kosovo. In the face of negative press and a cool reaction from the EU, Drnovsek made his case to Ljubljana's resident EU Ambassadors on October 25. One EU Ambassador called the Embassy to check our reaction and agreed with the view that Slovenia, through Drnovsek, wants to be a player on Kosovo. While not precisely embracing Drnovsek's plan, neither PM Janez Jansa, nor FM Dimitrij Rupel has created much distance between themselves and Drnovsek. As Jansa said to the press the plan is a "legitimate initiative of a head of state, which is informal and is an attempt to find a solution for the final status of Kosovo." Nonetheless, neither the MFA nor the Prime Minister's office was aware that Drnovsek was going to take the plan public at the time and in the manner he chose. Even Drnovsek's own foreign policy advisor, Ivo Vajgl, told COM that he had been surprised by Drnovsek's move.

3. (SBU) Both the president's office and the MFA undertook some damage control. Vajgl's trip to Belgrade on October 20 did not result in a new invitation for Drnovsek to visit, nor did it seem to budge the Belgrade government on the idea of Kosovo independence. But Vajgl, speaking to COM, claimed to have had positive discussions with FM Vuk Draskovic, in which they agreed on "four principles" for the way forward on Kosovo. He also said he had had multiple interviews with the Serb press, TV, and radio to help move the discussion forward. His discussions with the government in Pristina seemed to be more positive. Rupel reportedly spoke several times with his counterpart, FM Vuk Draskovic and feels confident that unhappiness with Drnovsek's plan will not be reflected in bilateral relations. Still, Rupel feels that Drnovsek's decision to go public was wrong and that, while he agrees with the substance of his proposals, he has not contributed anything new to the discussions which the Contact Group have been conducting. As an interesting side-bar, Rupel told COM that he and Vuk Draskovic, last January, had worked out a document of principles which Draskovic had then tried to get approval for in Belgrade, without success. For that reason the document never saw the light of day.

Working the Serbian Orthodox Church

14. (SBU) Coincidentally, Patriarch Pavle of the Serbian Orthodox Church was in Ljbuljana October 23 to consecrate the Serbian church of St. Cyril and Methodius down the street from the Embassy. One source highlighted that President Drnovsek had purposely gone to the consecration for the service and then met separately with the Patriarch. Noting that the Patriarch has "more influence over the feelings of the Serbs than any Serb politician," the source made clear that Drnovsek had used the time to press the Patriarch on his views on Kosovo.

COMMENT

15. (C) Janez Drnovsek, as the penultimate president of Yugoslavia and witness to Milosevic' infamous speech at Kosovo Polje in 1989 feels he has a particular contribution to make to resolving the issue of Kosovo's future status. Based on his experience and knowledge of "how the Serb mind works" Drnovsek seems determined to bring his "insider status" to bear in any way he can to influence the negotiations toward what he, and others, see as inevitable: "conditional independence" for Kosovo, and as soon as possible. We expect that Drnovsek will continue to speak out on this subject and will weigh in on occasion with the UN Special Envoy for Kosovo Status and Former Finnish President Ahtisaari as status negotiations proceed. As Drnovsek pointed out to Contact Group Ambassadors (reftel), Slovenia as the only member state of the former Yugoslavia now a member of both the EU and NATO is a model for what both Serbia and Kosovo can be in the future. And it is in Slovenia's political and economic interest that that happen as quickly and smoothly as possible.

ROBERTSON

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